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FROM: Center for Cryptologic History | Run Date: 08/24/2011

(U) The Netherlands had its counterpart to Herbert Yardley, the pioneer in U.S. cryptologic history who became head of our first interdepartmental cryptologic organization, the "American Black Chamber "

(U) Holland had its counterpart in Henri Koot, the "godfather" of Dutch military cryptology. Like Yardley, he had a very interesting background, and was seminal to the evolution of his nation's cryptologic organization into what, over time, became an extensive and important enterprise.

(U) Koot was born on Bali in 1883, the son of a Dutch East Indies colonial administrator of European extraction and a Chinese mother. He always showed an aptitude for languages, and was fluent in many of the tongues of modern-day Indonesia. Upon completing secondary school, he was accepted into the Royal Military Academy. Graduating third in his class in 1904, Koot was commissioned into the Dutch East Indies infantry. Thereafter followed a series of military posts and assignment as a civil administrator on various islands throughout the archipelago. In 1911, he studied at the Higher Military Staff College at The Hague.

(U) With war looming in 1914, the Dutch Army created a new organization, Division IV of the General Staff (GS 4). It was tasked with carrying out censorship, counter-intelligence, and cryptologic activities. In recognition of his talents, especially in mathematics and analysis, Lieutenant Koot received a transfer to this new unit upon its creation. Armed solely with a natural ability to solve complex puzzles, Koot sought to decipher foreign intercepts as well as to improve Dutch communications security. By war's end, his section had grown to twelve officers, and he had received a meritorious promotion as well as the Medal of Honor from the Dutch queen for his cryptologic activities. In 1919 the cipher division became an independent department (GS 3c), with Koot as its head.

(U) Within a year's time, Koot was made chief of a new Cryptographic Bureau, like the Black Chamber a centralized and interdepartmental government agency that nominally fell under the purview of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, although it also received funding from the military services. His organization did attempt to attack the ENIGMA, the encryption device already in use by the Germans, although Koot concluded -- perhaps too soon -- that it was unbreakable without access to its key. Koot also trained an entire generation of Dutch cryptologists, especially in the Army and Navy, in cryptography and espionage.

(U) The worldwide economic downturn hit every nation on Earth by the early 1930s. Unfortunately, and oddly similar to the fate of Yardley's outfit, the Dutch government decided that it could save money by shutting down the Cryptographic Bureau; then-Major Koot was dismissed, effective January 1, 1933. He went back to heading the Army cryptologic unit. But, unlike Yardley, Koot successfully rebounded. By 1939 he was a full colonel, and notably had established a series of listening posts throughout the Dutch colonial empire. He also had developed a new code system for Dutch forces on the eve of the Nazi invasion of the Low Countries in May 1940.

(U) The Netherlands capitulated to the Germans before the end of the month. Dutch cryptologic activity ceased, except for a few officers who managed to escape and were taken into Britain's Government Code & Cypher School; also, one officer augmented the Signals Intelligence Service of the U.S. Army. Koot stayed in Holland during the occupation, and soon after the Dutch surrender was arrested by the Germans. After a few months, he was released and remained in his country, working under the auspices of the Red Cross.

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(U) Koot secretly used his position to aid the Resistance. When the true nature of his activities was suspected, he was rearrested. Able again to persuade his captors to release him, Koot soon thereafter was appointed as commander of Interior Forces, a collection of Resistance and other military elements operating under the Dutch government-in-exile. In April 1945 he received temporary promotion to major general; this enabled him to negotiate the surrender of the German military command in Holland, since his German counterpart insisted on dealing only with an officer of equal rank.

(U) After the war, he received a knighthood and the Military Order of William. Additionally, he was offered the leadership post of the newly created *Bureau Nationale Veiligheid* ("Bureau of National Security" in English, abbreviated BNV), a reinvigorated security service. He turned down the opportunity but remained in military service until 1947. Koot, one of the greats of cryptology, albeit little known outside of his homeland, died a little over a decade later.

(U) Larger view of photo

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